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PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Letter dated 4 January 1999 from the Permanent Representative of Azerbaijan to the United Nations Office at Geneva addressed to the secretariat of the fifty-fifth session of the Commission on Human Rights

I have the honour to transmit to you herewith the address by the Milli Medjlis (Parliament) of the Republic of Azerbaijan to the United Nations and Parliaments of the countries of the world on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

I would be grateful if you could circulate the present letter and the above-mentioned address as an official document of the fifty-fifth session of the Commission on Human Rights under item 17 of the provisional agenda.

(Signed): Sima EIVAZOVA
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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On 10 December 1998, 50 years passed since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the United Nations. This momentous event was festively commemorated in many countries of the world, including Azerbaijan.

The people of Azerbaijan, striving for independence for centuries and overcoming difficulties in its way, had established in 1918 the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan and, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, restored its national independence. The young Azerbaijani State has chosen the way of democracy and protection of human rights and, encouraged by the initiatives of our President, Mr. Heydar Aliyev, has undertaken consistent steps in this direction: incorporated human rights and freedoms set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in other international instruments in its first Constitution; declared that a primary goal of our State was to ensure human and citizens' rights and freedoms; acceded to 20 international covenants, conventions and agreements in the field of human rights; for the first time in the Oriental and Muslim world abolished the death penalty; adopted a number of laws on the protection and ensuring of human rights.

Currently, the mechanism of the protection of human rights in Azerbaijan is also improving. More than 1,000 public associations, including dozens of organizations for the protection of human rights, have been registered and are active in our country.

A number of important documents were signed over the last years between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Council of Europe and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe with the purpose of studying and disseminating the international experience in the field of the protection of human rights. The development of cooperation in the field of democratic reforms and protection of human rights in Azerbaijan is envisaged in these documents.

Unfortunately, it is regretful to note that despite the half century that has passed since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, some of the States Members of the United Nations do not pay due respect to the rights and freedoms reflected in this document.

Thus, as a result of the policy of the Republic of Armenia of aggression and ethnic cleansing against Azerbaijan, the rights and freedoms of 1 million Azerbaijanis, who became refugees and displaced persons, continue to be gravely violated on a daily basis. As a result of such inhuman policy, 20 per cent of the territory of the Republic of Azerbaijan is occupied, more than 18,000 Azerbaijanis were killed, more than 20,000 people were injured, more than 50,000 became disabled, more than 4,000 were captured as prisoners of war, taken hostage or are missing, more than 4,000 industrial and agricultural enterprises, 660 schools and kindergartens, 250 hospitals and medical centres were destroyed; 724 towns, districts and villages, which were home to Azerbaijanis, were destroyed and burnt down. During the Khodjaly tragedy, one of the most terrible and heinous crimes of the century, the town of Khodjaly was destroyed in full; 613 civilians, including 63 children and 106 women, were brutally killed, 487 were disabled, 1,275 elderly people, women and children were taken hostages and subjected to unthinkable tortures,

physical abuse and harassment. No place in the world witnessed such unspeakable atrocities committed in one place on such a wide scale.

The Azerbaijani side supports the mediation efforts of different international organizations and uses all possible means for the peaceful settlement of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. In 1993, the United Nations Security Council adopted four resolutions demanding the withdrawal of the Armenian armed forces from the occupied territories of Azerbaijan and the return of refugees and displaced persons to their places of origin. Unfortunately, the Armenian side paid lip service to these resolutions and completely ignored the legitimate demands of the international community.

The situation that has emerged is the logical outcome of the policy of ethnic cleansing and genocide, which subjected our people to difficult privations and national tragedies and has been deliberately implemented against Azerbaijanis in the Caucasus in the last two centuries.

This inhuman policy, being implemented in stages, resulted in massive killings and deportations of Azerbaijanis from their historically inhabited lands, which today has become the territory of Armenia.

The international community should be aware of this injustice, unfairness and discrimination resulting in mass violations of human rights.

Mankind is now at the threshold of the twenty-first century, and it enters this century with the hope of reaching the highest summits of human rights protection. All people throughout the world wish to live in the twenty-first century in a peaceful world, a world protecting human rights, teaching the highest level of democracy and freedoms. This can be ensured only on condition that human rights and the rights of citizens are protected.

The Milli Medjlis of the Republic of Azerbaijan appeals to the United Nations and to all Parliaments of the world to use their authority to stop violations of the rights and freedoms of more than 1 million Azerbaijanis resulting from the aggressive policy of Armenia. It would be the greatest present possible for the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.